



Forest Stewardship Council certification standards for British Columbia

Setting the bar for well-managed forests

JOHN CATHRO

FOR YEARS IN BC, the land-use debate has been about protected areas – where not to log. Passionate, sometimes violent struggles have been waged among First Nations, environmental activists and communities on the one side and the forest industry on the other side, in places like the Elaho, Stein Valley, South Moresby Island, Clayoquot Sound and the Slocan Valley.

Now, if we thought this was hard, imagine sitting these same groups down to agree on how to log in a manner that is environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable.

Developing Forest Stewardship Council regional certification standards for BC has done just this.

Background to the FSC

Forest certification is a voluntary process where the performance of on-the-ground forestry operations is assessed against a predetermined set of standards. The Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) Principles and Criteria for forest management serve as the global foundation for developing certification standards appropriate to the social, cultural, ecological and economic considerations, at a national or regional level.

At the request of forest managers, independent certification bodies, accredited by the FSC, conduct impartial professional as-

sessments of forest operations. A certificate is issued if the forest operations are found to be in conformance with FSC standards, enabling the forest manager to use the FSC trademark logo. Standards, comprised of indicators and verifiers, represent the local interpretation of the globally applicable Principles and Criteria. The logo is the customers' guarantee that the forest products being purchased originate from a well-managed forest.

Founded in 1993, the FSC is a non-profit organization based in Oaxaca, Mexico. FSC standards are currently being developed in 36 countries. To date, almost 28 million ha have been certified worldwide, in 56 countries on 6 continents, including 1 million ha in Brazil, 3.2 million ha in the United States and 3.5 million ha in Poland.

One of the real strengths of the FSC approach is that decisions are shared equally among members in three "chambers": economic, environmental and social. When FSC Canada was formed in 1996, a fourth chamber was added – Indigenous Peoples – acknowledging the fundamental role of First Nations in Canada.

There are four regional initiatives in Canada: Maritimes, Great Lakes/St. Lawrence, British Columbia and the National Boreal. In addition, the Ontario Boreal pilot project has recently completed standards for use in Northern Ontario while the National Boreal standards are being completed.

Continued on page 20

FSC Principles

PRINCIPLE #1: COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS AND FSC PRINCIPLES

Forest management shall respect all applicable laws of the country in which they occur, and international treaties and agreements to which the country is a signatory, and comply with all FSC Principles and Criteria.

PRINCIPLE #2: TENURE AND USE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Long-term tenure and use rights to the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established.

PRINCIPLE #3: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS

The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories and resources shall be recognized and respected.

PRINCIPLE #4: COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND WORKER'S RIGHTS

Forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities.

PRINCIPLE #5: BENEFITS FROM THE FOREST

Forest management operations shall encourage the efficient use of the forest's multiple products and services to ensure economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits.

PRINCIPLE #6: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Forest management shall conserve biological diversity and its associated values, water resources, soils, and unique and fragile ecosystems and landscapes and, by so doing, maintain the ecological functions and the integrity of the forest.

PRINCIPLE #7: MANAGEMENT PLAN

A management plan – appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operations – shall be written, implemented, and kept up to date. The long-term objectives of management, and the means of achieving them, shall be clearly stated.

PRINCIPLE #8: MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

Monitoring shall be conducted – appropriate to the scale and intensity of forest management – to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, chain of custody, management activities and their social and environmental impacts.

PRINCIPLE #9: MAINTENANCE OF HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS

Management activities in high-conservation value forests shall maintain or enhance the attributes which define such forests. Decisions regarding high-conservation value forests shall always be considered in the context of a precautionary approach.

PRINCIPLE #10: PLANTATIONS

Plantations shall be planned and managed in accordance with Principles and Criteria 1-9, and Principle 10 and its Criteria. While plantations can provide an array of social and economic benefits, and can contribute to satisfying the world's needs for forest products, they should complement the management of, reduce pressures on, and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests.

The FSC in BC

Volunteers started the FSC-BC regional initiative in 1996 and the first draft standards were released in 1999. While the forest industry and government roundly criticized this early draft, they came to the table to work on Draft 2. Before long, the BC regional initiative grew to include over 15 percent of the global FSC membership.

The FSC-BC standards development process has been one of the most comprehensive and expensive in the world, not surprising given the enormity of the BC forest industry and the high value placed on the publicly administered forests. In the past three years, the FSC-BC Steering Committee, elected by members in BC, met regularly and hosted public information meetings at various locations across the province. The FSC-BC Steering Committee is comprised of two representatives from each of the four chambers. In early 2000, a 10-person technical standards team was appointed to develop Draft 2 for public review.

Draft 2 was released for public comment in April 2001. 175 respondents from across the political spectrum weighed in to provide detailed comments on how to improve the standards. At the same time, these draft standards were field tested by the accredited certifiers on three different tenure types in BC, to determine how to improve the auditability of the standards.

The results of the input into Draft 2 were presented to the BC Steering Committee in the fall of 2001. The Steering Committee spent the past winter deliberating over the final standards, which were passed on to FSC Canada for endorsement in April. These standards are expected to be endorsed and ready to be implemented by June of this year.

BC as a unique jurisdiction

All forested jurisdictions around the world see their forests as special, as serving func-

tions unique to that area. This seems to be particularly true in BC. In fact, few other places in the world possess the combination of factors that make the forests of BC so valued, and so contentious. The following factors have made the development of FSC standards a very challenging experience:

First among these is public ownership. About 95 percent of the forests of BC are publicly administered Crown lands, which means that the vast majority of forest management takes place by companies under licence to the provincial government. The laws that govern forest management on these lands are more stringent than on private land, reflecting the non-timber values placed on these lands by the public. The issue of public ownership, and the expectations of the public to be involved in planning are addressed in Principles 2 and 4.

This ownership is not only unique; it is in dispute. Few First Nations in BC have signed treaties that would otherwise clearly define their legal rights and the extent and limits of aboriginal rights and title. Increasingly, provincial and federal case law is confirming that the onus is on the Crown to consult with First Nations and accommodate their interests regarding resource extraction in their traditional territories. The issue of Indigenous People's Rights is addressed under Principle 3.

While this important ownership question is being resolved, one aspect of BC forests with which most agree is the fact that BC is endowed with forests of global significance. The coastal temperate rainforests have been in the international spotlight for years, and are recognized as globally endangered. In addition, the boreal forests in BC's northeast and the interior temperate rainforests in the southeast are forests that are seen increasingly as globally significant. Managing these forests is addressed under Principle 6. Identifying and protecting High Conservation Values is addressed under Principle 9.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the world

While FSC standards were being developed in BC, a couple of important events occurred elsewhere to heighten the profile of the FSC. Most important of these was the announcements by several large forest products retailers in the United States and in Europe of procurement policies that favoured the FSC. Home Depot and Lowe's – the two largest retailers of forest products in the United States – the home-furnishing manufacturer Ikea, and the large European retailer B and Q, among others, have committed to buy only FSC products. To date, as FSC standards are being developed, this remarkable demand has not been satisfied by supply of FSC certified wood.

Secondly, certification in general has become accepted as a practical forest management tool. Other certification systems exist besides the FSC – Canadian Standards Association (CSA), International Standards Organization (ISO) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) – and there are significant differences in what these systems say they can do. However, the provincial governments of Ontario, New Brunswick and British Columbia have committed to using certification as one means of ensuring that environmental standards on public forest land are being met while lessening the regulatory burden on forest managers. In public forests in the United Kingdom and in several state forests in the United States, governments have already received FSC certification.

Finally, companies seeking membership in the Forest Products Association of Canada are required to get their forests certified. Between increasing market demand, and this growing acceptance among regulators and forest managers, it is clear that forest certification is here to stay.

What will FSC change in BC?

Once endorsed and taken up by forest managers, these standards will have a very real impact in BC. Part of this impact will be on the ground and part of it will be felt before logging starts, at the planning level.

FSC standards implemented in BC will mean:

Principle 3 will help facilitate a major shift in the relationship between forest managers and First Nations. In the BC context, this will mean that a protocol agreement is signed by the First Nation and the forest manager that outlines the expectations and requirements for logging in traditional territories. The standards do not spell out the contents of this agreement, simply that both parties must agree to the contents. This will lead to greater certainty for forest managers and greater economic benefits for First Nation communities.

High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) will be identified, mapped and protected. These HCVFs may occur at the global and the local level and can have either ecological or social attributes, including critical wildlife habitat, rare or under-represented ecosystems, culturally significant areas and consumptive-use watersheds. Logging is permitted in HCVFs but the HCVF attributes must first be protected.

Forest management will occur within the range of natural variability (RONV). RONV is the range of dynamic change in natural systems in the last 2000 years and includes consideration of the range of ecosystem conditions such as seral stage distribution, patch size distribution, stand structure and natural disturbance regimes. Using RONV as a baseline for forest management will mean that logging on the coast, where stand replacing natural events are rare, will look very different than in the dry interior where fire plays a dominant role.

The public will meaningfully participate in planning on publicly administered lands. As an example, the BC standards require the forest manager to ensure public participation in planning and to agree to a dispute-resolution mechanism. The standards do not tell the manager how to hold meetings, or how often, or who to contact. The onus is on the manager to meet the local needs. This will result in specific local issues being accommodated directly by the manager before logging starts.

The allowable annual cut will be an output of planning. Reserve areas will be established before timber planning occurs, with the understanding that ecosystem integrity is the first priority. This will ensure that the rate of cut can be maintained over the long term while maintaining biological diversity at all spatial and temporal scales.

Conclusion

There are some things that the FSC cannot change in BC. One of these is that the level of trust between divergent groups – what the FSC calls chambers – is not very high. Voluntary standards, no matter how great the demand for the end product, will not fill this particular void.

Secondly, FSC certification is voluntary. This means that forest managers must want to get their forests certified and see a clear benefit in doing so. In the short term, there may not be a price premium for FSC-certified products, but secure market access will be reason enough for some.

Certification was never intended to be all things to all people, to solve all of the problems everywhere. At the very least, the standards development process in BC is a bookmark in the ongoing debate over what constitutes well-managed forestry. Hopefully, these standards will be looked back on in the coming years as an important milestone in the resolution of land-use conflict in BC. The final test, of course, is not the standards themselves but, on the ground, when the standards are applied.

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